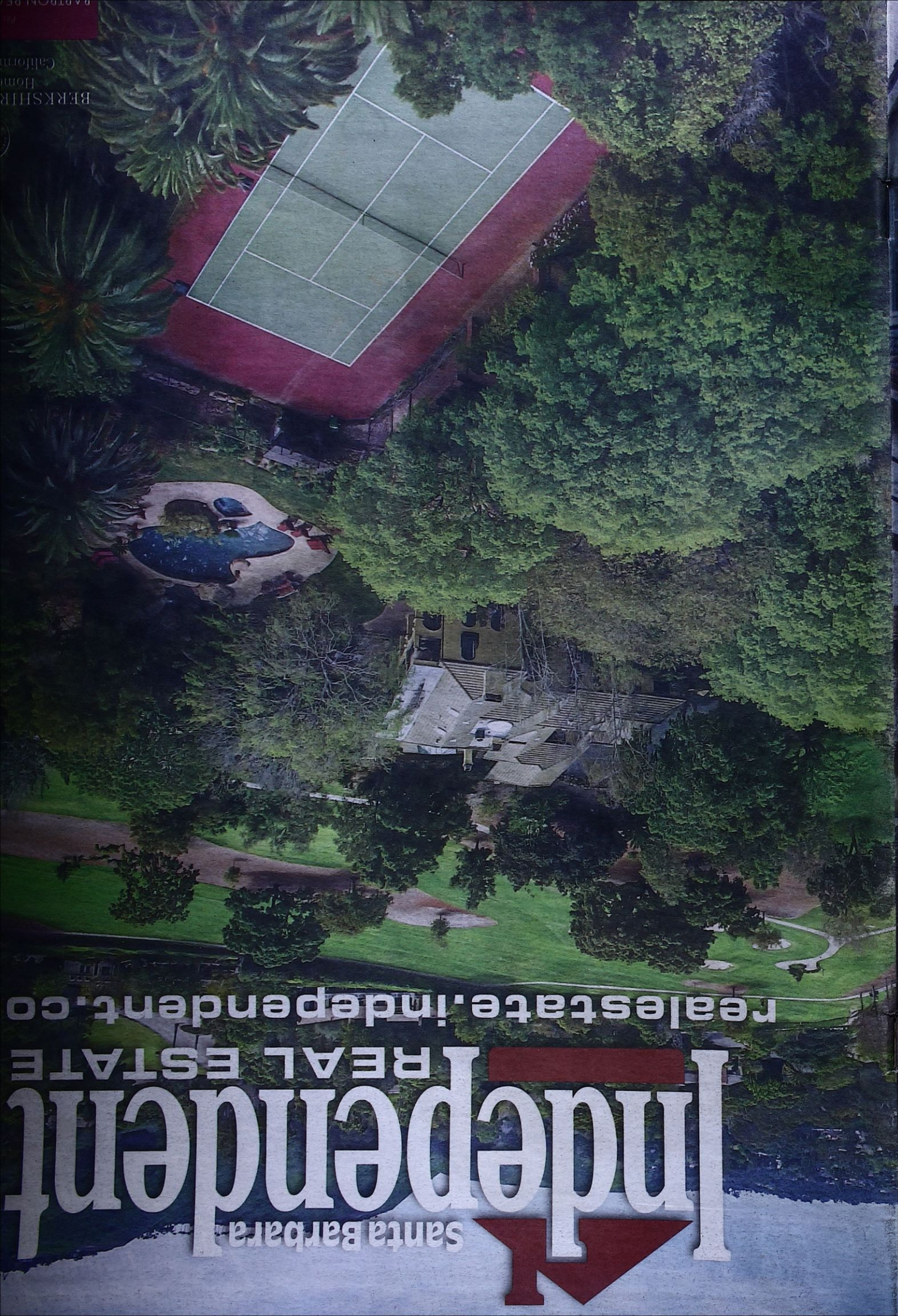




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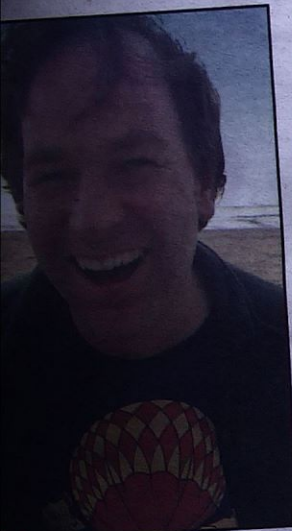
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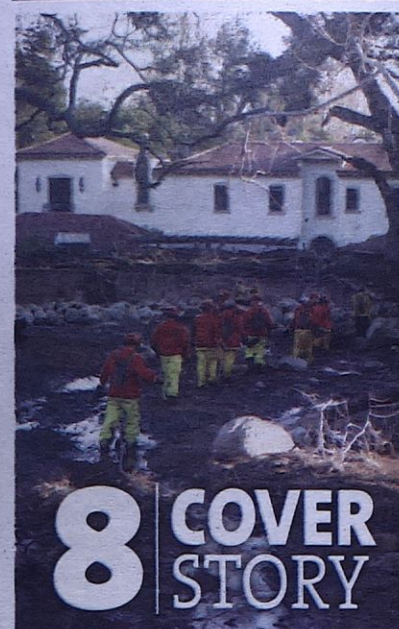
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Contact information:
12 E. Figueroa St., Santa Barbara, CA 93101
PHONE (805) 965-5205; FAX (805) 965-5518; CLASSIFIED (805) 965-5208
EMAIL news@independent.com, letters@independent.com
Staff:

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8 COVER STORY

Digging Out
Heroism and Tragedy During
the Worst Disaster in Santa
Barbara History

(Indy Staff)

ON THE COVER: A specialized crew of firefighters assesses a home near Sycamore Canyon Road that was severely damaged in the January 9 mudslides. After spending two days at the site and recovering one body, they'll come to understand that they'll need to first demolish the home and then continue their search for deceased among the rubble. Photo by Brandon Ydegari.

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MAPPING IMPACT AND STORIES FROM THE FLOOD

Recovery in the aftermath of the mudslides in Montecito will likely take weeks to months. As firefighters, paramedics, search-and-rescue teams, inmate crews, and law enforcement focus on recovery efforts, the *Indy* team is undertaking a mapping initiative to assess the impacted areas in Montecito, providing a visual account of what took place on January 9. Working systematically in small areas at a time, our staff is working to provide a street-by-street look at which homes were impacted while weaving in stories from across the community. Find the map and continuing coverage of the disaster at independent.com.

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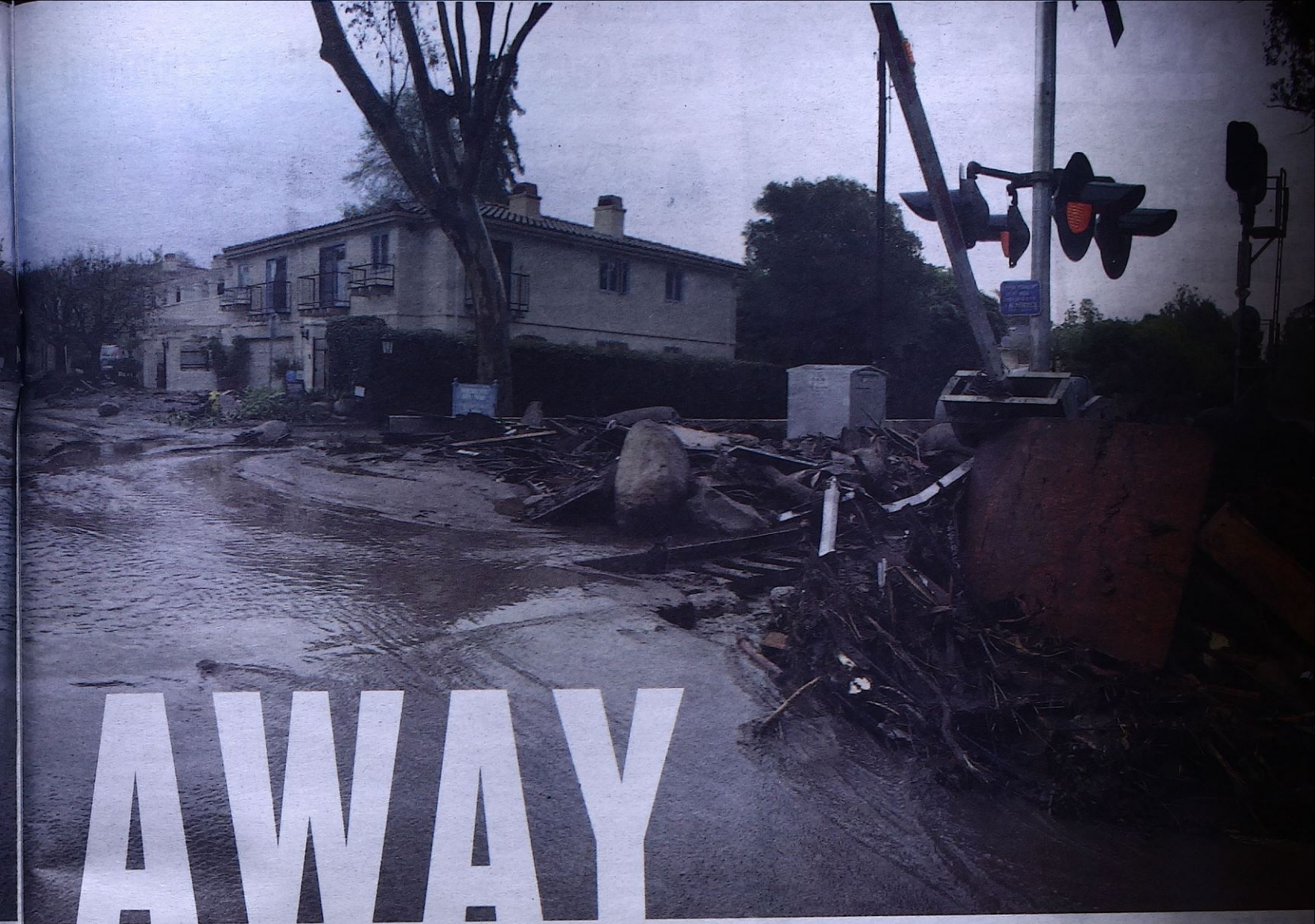
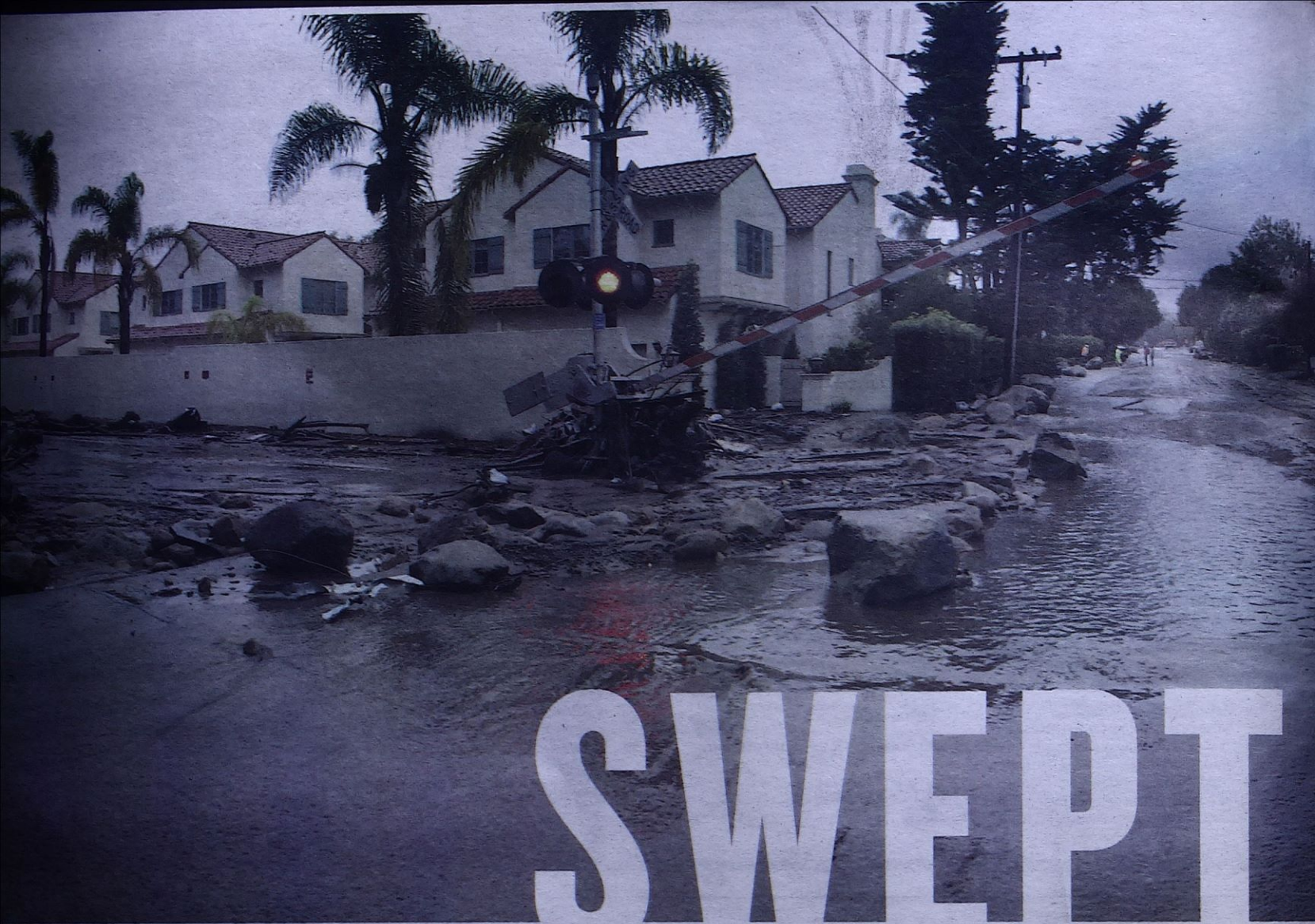
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SWEEP AWAY

Sometimes words fail.

The scientific term is “debris flow.” Commonly we call it a “mudslide.” Neither comes close to conveying the awesome geologic violence wrought upon Montecito and the entire South Coast early on January 9.

Hurricanes, tornadoes, and fires all have first names. Katrina. Harvey. Irma. And most recently, our very own Thomas, now the biggest fire in state history. By contrast, the monster that just turned our community upside down has no

When it comes to collective grief, we are in uncharted territory.

Rage, inevitably, is right around the corner.

Santa Barbara, as some like to say, lies perched on the edge of nature. Last week, nature pushed us off. The storm event began in earnest early Tuesday morning around 3:30. For about half an hour, lacerating rains slashed away the steep hillsides. Only two weeks before, the Thomas Fire had roiled through those same hills. Firefighters had mounted a heroic defense, miraculously protecting most of Montecito. With

Imagine the longest drought in Santa Barbara history, followed by the biggest natural fire in California history. Then, while that fire is still smoldering, watch a late-night winter rainstorm dive-bomb the scorched earth with four times more impact than the direst forecasts. Meteorologists were freaking out when predicting Tuesday's rains, which they feared might deliver as much as one to two inches an hour. It turns out they didn't freak out enough. In some places, we got half an inch of water in five minutes.

Hence the disaster with no name.

DEATH TOLL APPROACHING 23 FOR WORST DISASTER IN S.B. HISTORY

ame, first, last, or otherwise.

As of this writing, Santa Barbara has officially abandoned hope of finding more survivors. But the truly intrepid rescue teams, with their amazing search dogs, continue working to unbury the missing. Should the grim arithmetic be borne out, the death toll for the event with no name will reach 23. It could well go higher. In the meantime, official documents set the mortality count at 20. Add to this the 127 single-family homes that were destroyed and the 294 that were damaged.

By Santa Barbara standards, this ranks as our worst catastrophe—natural or otherwise—ever. The great earthquake of 1905—still the single most transformative event to hit Santa Barbara in the past 200 years—claimed the lives of 13 people. Other catastrophes such as David Attias in 2001, Jennifer San Marco in 2006, and Elliott Rodger in 2014 killed four, seven, and six people in their respective rampages.

only 27 single-family homes destroyed in Santa Barbara County, the thousands of evacuated residents breathed a sigh of relief, thinking they had dodged a bullet. But the greatest horror lay waiting in the dirt itself.

High-intensity heat from fires such as Thomas slowly cooks the top few inches of soil, turning it into a fine, crumbly powder. Any roots that once kept the top mantle of soil intact have been blowtorched into oblivion. Flood-control experts, who refer to this condition as “dry creep,” swear they can hear it sloughing its way down the mountain.

Add to that the gnarled canopy of chaparral covering Santa Barbara's backcountry, and the picture gets more ominous. Chaparral plants contain waxy compounds that, when heated, ooze out onto the soil as liquid paraffin. This waxy shell in turn deflects raindrops that might otherwise be absorbed by the soil.

Now turn up the volume to 11.

Torrential rivers of dirt, silt, and ash careened down the steep hillsides, racing toward the meandering creek basins that make Montecito such a bucolic paradise. Along the way, it gathered more steam, sucking up and vomiting out much of the burned rubble from the fire: trees, logs, gravel, rocks, and boulders the size of tour buses. This blackened slurry creates a seemingly impossible buoyancy that allows even the most massive rocks to float. It also rushes by faster than humans can bring themselves to believe.

Last week's debris flow was hardly Santa Barbara's first. Jim Stubchaer, then an engineer with County Flood Control, remembers the avalanche of mud that took 250 homes back in November 1964 when heavy rains followed quickly on the heels of the Coyote Fire. He was there in 1969 and 1971 when it happened again. “We had a saying back in the day for those canyons,” said Stubchaer about Santa Barbara's steep mountain slopes. “We said they were shotguns, loaded with rocks and set off by fire.”

Indeed.

Disaster response efforts were in place well before the sky began to fall in the predawn hours on January 9. The night before, teams of firefighters—engines and strike teams from multiple agencies—and about 200 first responders were positioned throughout Montecito and Carpinteria in anticipation of flash floods. All fire stations were put on alert. A multiagency incident command was created for an incident that had yet to happen.

Three days before the onslaught, all the usual suspects in the world of emergency responders convened in front of

television cameras. They predicted flash floods 10 times worse than normal because of the fire-scarred

hillsides. Supervisor Das Williams intoned the term “clear and present danger.” Mandatory evacuation orders were announced for 7,000 people living in the foothills upslope from Highway 192, effective Monday at noon. Another 23,000 people—living downslope from Highway 192—were put on warning.

Nobody screamed or shouted. Maybe they should have.

In the end, only 15 percent of those living in the mandatory evacuation zone got out. That's considerably more, however, than those who lived in the warning zone. How these zones were mapped—and why the evacuation zones were not drawn to adhere to the downstream flow of creek channels rather than the geographically irrelevant Highway 192—will be the subject of intense discussion and, in all probability, litigation in the months to come.

Firefighters, emergency planners, law enforcement officers, and other first responders—traumatized from risking

life and limb; working long, harrowing hours; and pulling dead bodies out of the muck—bristle at the suggestion they didn't do everything possible. Emails, texts, emergency alerts, and phone calls were made. Doors were knocked on. Homeless camps along creek bottoms were roused. What else could they do?

Beverley Jackson, an imposing Montecito doyenne and longtime society columnist for the *Santa Barbara News-Press* and the *Independent*, recalled getting the knock and refusing to budge. “I had just got back from spending eight days in a motel because of the Thomas Fire,” she said. “I didn't want to be evacuated again. I have a dog. And I felt very comfortable there.” Jackson added she'd been through multiple floods and fires during her time in Montecito. “At 89, I wanted to prove I could do it,” she said. “I'm not going to age gracefully.”

However, there are also residents living in the warning zone who felt that they'd been given a false sense of security. Many—old hands now at the evacuation drill—had their bags packed and cars loaded when the storm hit. But by the time county emergency alerts went out, it was too late. They couldn't get out. Or as one longtime emergency-planning expert put it, “Of course people are going to be stupid. Our job is to work around them, not blame them.”

The dance of droughts, fires, and floods is ancient and endemic to Southern California's landscape. It's how creeks change course and mountains move. But as California's extreme weather gyrations grow ever more extreme, pushed no doubt by climate change and global warming, new emergency response strategies will be needed. Abe Powell, a member of the Montecito Fire board and one of Montecito's most active public citizens, noted that this was the first time a flood event—as opposed to fires—was occasion for an organized evacuation effort.

As South Coast emergency planners re-engineer warning—and mobilize—area residents about future disasters, Montecito and Santa Barbara face the more immediate challenges of digging their way out of this one. Highway 192, as told, won't be open for yet another week. In the meantime, about 15,000 people who live in Ventura and Santa Barbara can't get to their jobs. Cottage Hotels reportedly putting up about 200 workers in local hotels, flying some in and transporting others by boat. Santa Barbara companies depend on out-of-town visitors. The Montecito Water District is facing multiple challenges. Its primary mains used to get water from its reservoir storage basins. At this point, about half its customers have no water at all; another half can get some but just barely. In this grim context, the good news is that things could be worse but aren't. The main conduit connecting Montecito customers to water from Lake Cachuma is not broken. The first thought. Dozens of workers from other water districts—near and far—have chipped in to help Montecito locate and assess damages. In the meantime, how the district was the target of the first lawsuit filed in the last week's catastrophe, charging that the nine million gallons that leaked out of one of Montecito's storage reservoirs was a bad situation that much worse.

In the meantime, Santa Barbarans are responding to disaster the way they always do: with massive outpourings of community support. As can be expected, the same grandstanding by a few self-serving publicists. But mostly, community residents are striving to chip in and help out.

In the years to come, January 9, 2018, will be the measuring stick by which all subsequent disasters will be compared. Future generations can only pray for a more measured response.

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Evac Zones, Emergency Alerts Explained

by Jean Yamamura

At 10 at night the Monday before the storm, Rob Lewin told his people at the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to grab a cot and get some sleep, or go home if it was nearby, but be ready to work in four hours' time. He and his staff had warned Montecito and Carpinteria of the pending rains at a press conference the Friday before and sent alerts to 21,000-40,000 contacts by every means possible since. They'd put in the direst terms that flash floods, mudslides, and debris flows were threatened from the rainstorm headed for Santa Barbara's South Coast. Now they had to wait for it to arrive.

Out in Montecito, a swift water rescue squad and urban search-and-rescue teams were standing by. Six inmate crews had spent the day clearing creek beds, following up on three weeks of debris basin clearing by County Public Works. High-clearance military trucks had arrived. More support was requested from the state in advance of the storm, unheard of among California emergency planners. Sheriff's deputies spent the day banging on doors, informing people of the mandatory evacuation order in place above Highway 192. "In our minds, we were geared up," said Lewin, who'd been reading up on floods from Montecito's past. He knew they were possible all the way down to Coast Village Road and the highway.

That Sunday, a summit had gathered at the EOC to make a decision on the evacuation borders. Technical advisors gave the worst-case scenario: a heavy rainstorm of up to an inch per hour, maybe as much as four inches total. With the hillsides scoured of vegetation by the Thomas Fire, the flood risk was 10 times greater. But historically, even during the rain-soaked year of 1969 — which had no fire, Lewin acknowledged — the dangerous rock and mudflows had stayed in the higher elevations above the 192.

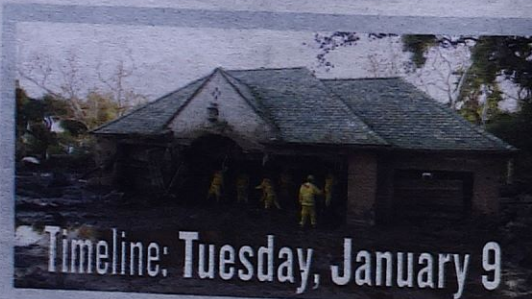
Sheriff Bill Brown accepts the responsibility for placing the mandatory evacuation line at the 192, though he was not in the room; Under-sheriff Barney Melekian was there in his stead. "The 192 is the only straight east-west arterial that there was," Brown said. "Everything else was a winding spaghetti of neighborhood streets." The evacuation zones used, said Brown, had been developed after the Jesusita Fire, when it became obvious that the Sheriff's Office needed to have a fast way to select evac areas and identify the intersections needed to keep them closed.

"The storm that was predicted, and that we were prepared for, was not the storm we got," Brown said. The rain intensity was not only unprecedented in Santa Barbara but also in all of California history. "Eighty-six hundredths of an inch fell in 15 minutes!" he exclaimed.

Kevin Cooper, a biologist with the U.S. Forest Service, said, "The expectation was that rainfall of one inch per hour could kick something loose, but that it wouldn't go very far. As slopes lessen, the debris drops out. For something to push all the way out to the ocean like it did had to be an extraordinary event."

"I was there for some of those deliberations," Cooper said of the decisions made regarding Montecito's evacuation areas. "There was a real and honest struggle on how to base decisions on predictions with wide probabilities. Do you evacuate 20,000-30,000 people every time a rainstorm comes? You have to base that on what you expect. If you have biblical storms, that's just not predictable."

A flash flood is just that, a rush of water that happens instantly. Although the weather radar can see such a cloudburst form, emergency managers have very little time to issue a warning. The National Weather Service let the EOC know sometime after 1 a.m. on Tuesday that it was sending out a flash flood warning. Lewin recalled, the highest level of notification.



- "Sometime after 1 a.m.," according to EOC Director Lewin: National Weather Service notifies EOC of preparations to send out cell-phone flash flood warning, its highest level of alert.
- 2:30 a.m.: Weather Service issues flash flood warning.
- 2:46 a.m.: EOC sends own flash flood alert within Thomas and Whittier fire burn areas to phones registered with county's Aware & Prepare program.
- 3:07 a.m.: EOC issues flash flood warning to registered phones in Alamo Fire burn area.
- 3:38 a.m.: Five-minute, half-inch downpour begins near Casa Dorinda, at Olive Mill and Hot Springs roads.
- 3:51 a.m.: EOC sends county-wide flash flood alert through federal Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system.
- 3:51 a.m. to approximately 4:51 a.m.: Alerts made incrementally by overwhelmed WEA phone system.
- 4:05 a.m.: First 9-1-1 call for water rescue received.

Trouble was, the text alert did not get to Lewin's phone or that of anyone else at the EOC who had Verizon as their carrier. Worried, the EOC composed and sent its own message through multiple channels — text, email, Reverse 9-1-1, and social media — at

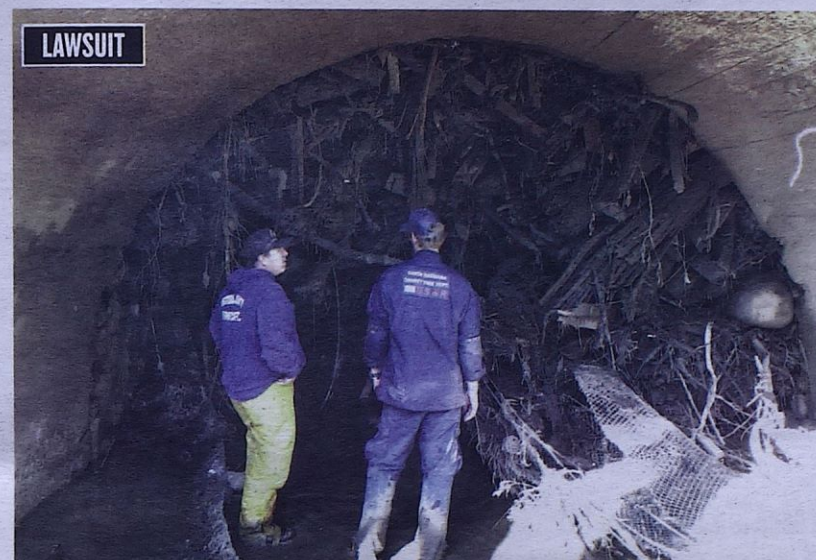
2:46 a.m. to Thomas and Whittier burn areas, at 3:07 a.m. to the Alamo Fire area, and as a county-wide Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) at 3:51 a.m. The phone system couldn't handle the onslaught of the thousands of calls; they took about an hour to all be dialed.

"All the systems have limits," Lewin said, wearily. "An email can say everything. Nixle is 138 characters." And the emergency center's version of Twitter is the older, 140-character one. "We struggle so hard to put together a meaningful message in 90 characters," Lewin continued, speaking of the federal WEA system. "East of here, west of there. No one knows what's east or west here. And 'evacuation' is a long word." The WEA (pronounced WE-ah) system plagues Lewin. "How would you feel in Santa Maria if you got an evacuation text to get to higher ground?" he asked rhetorically.

About the only bright spot in the urgency of getting out the alerts was that the Emergency Alert System (EAS) worked, a system Lewin's been trying to fix for some time. "I was watching KEYT," said Lewin, "and the emergency banner showed up correctly." Previously, an alert would switch a Cox cable viewer's channel to C-SPAN. It also would fail to display the banner.

Now that the storm has passed, geologists, hydrologists, and soils scientists with the state Watershed Emergency Response Team are outlining man-made structures still at risk. Lewin reported his team had succeeded in getting authorization from the feds to fund high-resolution mapping for the new land contours left in Montecito by the flood.

LAWSUIT



Montecito Water Bruised and Sued

Nick Turner might have the most impossible job in Santa Barbara County. Two years ago, he took over as general manager of the Montecito Water District at the bottom of the drought and when district critics engineered a takeover of the board. Now, with most of Montecito buried thigh-high in an avalanche of mud and much of the district's delivery infrastructure destroyed or seriously compromised, Turner is struggling to resume some semblance of service to his 4,500 water customers.

"It's up in the air," he conceded recently. "There's a lot we just don't know yet," like how long it will take to fix the pipes connecting the district to Jameson Lake, one of its main supply sources. The pipes feeding Jameson to the district were broken during the January 9 storm, and contractors are on the scene preparing to make the fix. Even when that happens, a lot remains uncertain, such as whether water from the lake, choked with ash-and-mud-infused runoff, can be treated to a potable level.

Even with all this uncertainty, Turner projects a crisp, if beleaguered, competence. District crews and contractors have managed to get most of the temporary repairs made to a key stretch of delivery pipe that feeds the district's seven mini storage reservoirs. Those fixes should be completed Friday. After that,

the district will have the pressure needed to move water. Right now, supplies move either not at all or at a slow dribble.

The next step is flushing the pipes of contaminated water, injecting highly chlorinated water through the system to decontaminate it, and then flushing it again. How long all that will take and when it can start remains speculative. It all depends on state water-quality regulators. In the meantime, the district's boil-water orders remain in effect. "There's no book on how this happens," Turner said. "It's all brand-new."

Adding to Turner's woe, his district was just sued by a triad of high-powered attorneys waging a mass tort action. The complaint, filed last Friday, three days after the storm, alleges that eight million to nine million gallons of water were negligently allowed to drain out of Water District reservoirs and spill into Montecito's creek channels, which were engulfed in a disastrous debris-flow event the morning of January 9, because the district's system of automatic shut-off valves failed. As a result, the lawsuit contends, 37,530 tons of water spilled into Montecito's creeks that otherwise would not have been there, thus contributing significantly to the disaster.

Turner said he hadn't had a chance to read the complaint and declined to comment.

—Nick Welsh



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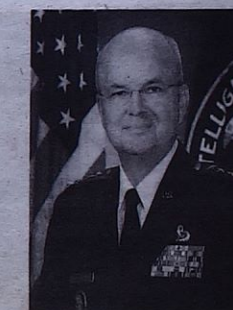
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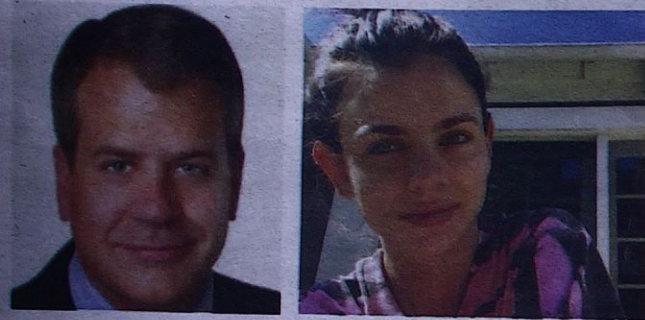
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REMEMBERING THE VICTIMS

by Indy Staff

Children, students, young adults, middle-aged executives, landscapers, well-to-do retirees, immigrants from near and far — the list of people who were tragically killed by the Montecito mudslides is a powerful reminder that this enclave is home not just to the rich and famous but to a diverse group of neighbors who've worked hard to enjoy our usually idyllic climate and community. Here are brief tributes to the victims.

Dr. Mark Montgomery, 54; Caroline Montgomery, 22



Dr. Mark Montgomery, his daughter Caroline, and son Duffy had just returned home after a Christmas trip to South America when disaster struck. "They were the sort of family that took trips instead of exchanging presents," said longtime friend Allwyn Fitzpatrick. She reckons the jet-lagged Montgomerys were probably fast asleep when the steep hillsides turned liquid and deadly.

Duffy, the youngest of three kids, would survive. Caroline, a senior at Barnard College, did not, nor did her father, a noted hand surgeon.

Both father and daughter were driven by an adventurous spirit. A world traveler with ambitions for a career in fashion design and marketing, Caroline was reportedly graced with an "effervescent curiosity," according to a friend. As a hand surgeon, Montgomery enjoyed ferocious loyalty among his patients. He was skilled, available, and direct. And he bubbled over with wry humor.

An avid athlete, Montgomery played softball, rugby, and hockey. He took his office staff to Dodger games even though he was an ardent Yankee fan, having grown up in New York. Montgomery sponsored the Foresters, Santa Barbara's semi-pro baseball team, giving players a place to stay and buying, on occasion, a keg of beer to share with fans. "He really enjoyed what he did, and he wanted other people to enjoy it too," said another longtime friend. Montgomery's wife, Catherine, and oldest daughter were still in South America when they learned of the tragedy.

Joseph Francis Bleckel, 87

Joseph Bleckel was found in his home off Romero Canyon last week, after search-and-rescue workers scoured his property for the second time. Bleckel lived alone, having survived his wife, Margaret. Bleckel was the child of a single mother, a poor Italian immigrant who married an American GI who was killed during World War I. He grew up the hard way, joining the U.S. Navy, serving during the Korean War, and getting a degree in engineering on the GI Bill. Bleckel worked for Westinghouse, loved the Dodgers, and managed to retire at age 66. He gave quietly but generously to organizations like Direct Relief and the Cancer Center. He had no children, but is survived by a multitude of nephews and nieces.



Martín Cabrera-Muñoz, 48

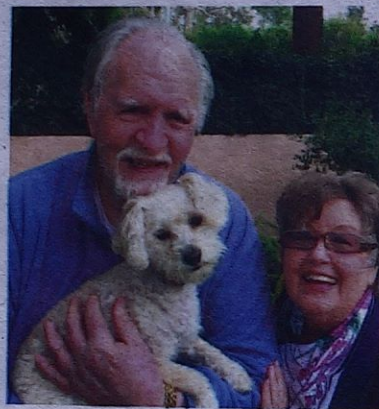
A landscaper by profession, Martín Cabrera-Muñoz was brought from Guanajuato, Mexico, to Santa Barbara by his mother in 1998, according to his brother, Joel Muñoz. Martín lived on East Valley Road with the Benítez family and leaves behind three children, Alejandro, Gabriela, and Uriel Cabrera, who live in Mexico.

"My brother was such a hard worker, such a jokester," said Joel. "He worked to support his kids in

Mexico, and on his free time, he liked to visit all our siblings here in Santa Barbara, Lompoc, and Los Angeles and spend the weekend with us."

Cabrera-Muñoz also enjoyed listening to music, everything from Mexican music to rock 'n' roll and KISS. "Overall, he wanted to give his kids a better life," said his sister Diana Montero.

The Muñoz family has set up a GoFundMe page to cover funeral arrangements: [gofundme.com/services-for-our-brother](https://www.gofundme.com/services-for-our-brother).



Alice Mitchell, 78; James Mitchell, 89

The Mitchells moved to Montecito in 1995 after raising their two children in Orange County. Their three-bedroom, Spanish-style home was located at 319 Hot Springs Road at the intersection of Hot Springs and Olive Mill roads, a neighborhood wholly transformed by the flooding into vast boulder fields and uprooted trees among the mudflow. The couple had long dreamed of retiring in Montecito, and Alice's artwork filled their home, which they called "Casa de Contenta," meaning house of happiness or contentment. Alice was a teacher, and Jim worked in labor relations.

John McManigal, 61

The father of six sons, John McManigal — who started his own equipment financing company called MEDCAP Asset Finance after a 16-year career with IBM — was active in Santa Barbara's sports community, supporting water polo programs at Santa Barbara High (where five of his sons played) as well as the Foresters, the semi-pro baseball team for which his son, Connor, played. McManigal's last act was waking up Connor as the storm waters hit, and his son survived after being swept nearly a mile away from their Hot Springs Road home.

"My dad left behind an incredible legacy that my brothers and I will continue to carry forward," wrote his son Will on Facebook.

His memorial is on Saturday, January 20, 2 p.m., at the First Presbyterian Church of Santa Barbara. His family has decided to give the money raised on their GoFundMe page to the Benítez family, with whom they grieved in the hospital: [gofundme.com/qmv424-the-mcmanigal-family](https://www.gofundme.com/qmv424-the-mcmanigal-family).



Rebecca Riskin, 61

Known as the "first lady of luxury Montecito real estate," Rebecca Riskin went from being a professional ballerina in New York City to growing Riskin Partners into one of the most successful property purveyors in the region, with more than \$2 billion in closed sales since the company's founding in the early 1990s. Known for working late at night, she was swept away from her living room during the storm; her husband, who was upstairs, suffered serious injuries but survived. "We intend to carry out her life's work with the same strength, grace, and elegance that wholly defined Rebecca," said Dina Landi, the firm's managing partner, in a statement. "Rebecca was an exceptional woman, and her legacy will continue to live on and thrive through her children, Robert and Julia, her husband, Ken Grand, and her namesake firm, Riskin Partners."

Donations in her name can be made to [tri-counties.org](https://www.tri-counties.org).



Roy Rohter, 84

After retiring from real estate, Roy Rohter celebrated his devout Catholic faith by founding St. Augustine Academy in Ventura in 1994. Today, 165 students attend the school. "Roy's life has been in service to his good, loving, and ever-forgiving God," said the school's headmaster, Michael Van Hecke. "He's been a deep supporter of the school in every way and a mentor to me personally, to the faculty and to the kids." Rohter's wife, Theresa, was also swept away by the flood but was rescued and survived.

Josephine 'Josie' Marie Franceschini Gower, 69

Popular in many social circles and known for zipping around town in a red convertible, Josie Gower will be remembered as a lover of life. "She was the life of the party, always, and loved us all so fiercely," her daughter-in-law Sarah Gower wrote on Facebook. Born in 1948 to Italian immigrant parents, Gower got a nursing degree from SBCC but then sailed through the South Pacific, where she married New Zealand rancher Jack Gower. Upon returning to Santa Barbara, she managed properties, was crowned "Queen of the Y" at the Montecito YMCA, and became an active member of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. She is survived by two adult children, Briana Haigh and Hayden Gower; three grandchildren, Parker, Luca, and Poppy; her partner, Norm Borgatello; and her sister Elda's family, the Castagnolas. A celebration of her life will be held on Thursday, January 18, 10 a.m. at the Santa Barbara Mission.

Donations can be made in her name to the Montecito Family YMCA, 591 Santa Rosa Ln., Santa Barbara, CA 93108.



David Cantin, 49

As a scoutmaster for Boy Scout Troop 33, David Cantin shared his love of the outdoors with his 16-year-old son, Jack, who is still missing as of press time. His 14-year-old daughter, Lauren, was the girl miraculously pulled from the mud by firefighters, and his wife, Kim, also survived when their house was destroyed by the slide. As vice president of NDS Surgical Imaging, Cantin sold operating room technology that enables minimally invasive procedures, and was well known to the tight-knit Santa Barbara Middle School community, who have been grieving his death and praying for Jack, an alum.

Donations can be made at [gofundme.com/cantinfamilyfund](https://www.gofundme.com/cantinfamilyfund).

Morgan Corey, 25; Sawyer Corey, 12



Four members of the Corey household were swept away by the storm: Carrie Baker and her 12-year-old daughter, Summer, were found a mile from their home and are recovering from serious injuries. But Summer's twin, Sawyer, a 6th grader at Cold Spring School, and their older half sister, Morgan Corey, did not survive.

"As with so many other families, we know that as their house came down around them, our girls clung to each other as best they could while being washed away," wrote Morgan's sister Taylor Owens on the fundraising site Fundly. "Our grief for our girls . . . is immense, insurmountable, and impossible to communicate."

Donations can be made at [fundly.com/morgan-sawyer-and-summer-corey-fund](https://www.fundly.com/morgan-sawyer-and-summer-corey-fund) and [gofundme.com/carrie-baker-fund](https://www.gofundme.com/carrie-baker-fund).

Kailly Benítez, 3; Marilyn Ramos, 27; Jonathan Benítez, 10



Nearly an hour after the deadly storm hit, 2-year-old Ian Benítez was pulled from a muddy woodpile by a firefighter directly down to his face allowed him to breathe. Rescuers could barely hear him cry. He had traveled three-quarters of a mile from his home. Benítez was initially thought to be a baby girl by nearby resident and firefighter Dustin McKibben, who pulled him out. Benítez was initially thought to be a baby girl by nearby resident and "Augie" Johnson because he has long hair.

For the past week, Ian has joined his father, Victor Benítez, in the hospital. Victor, whose entire body is badly injured, wanted to let Ian go, friends say. His oldest son, Jonathan, a 5th grader in Omar Espinoza's class at Cleveland Elementary, died. He was remembered as a joyful kid. Victor's wife and the boys' mother, Faviola Benítez Calderon, 28, is still in the hospital.

Victor lived with his brother, Antonio, on East Valley Road. The brothers, who immigrated from Mexico, started a company, Faviola worked as a housekeeper. Antonio's wife, Marilyn Ramos, and their daughter, Kailly, were both out of bed that night and killed. Marilyn was a stay-at-home mom and, the Associated Press reported, was in close family in Marquelia near Acapulco on the coast in Mexico.

The Benítez family had lived in Montecito for a number of years. Robin Lewis said they worked for her, as families in her Goleta neighborhood, since 2011. In the summer months, she said, Victor brought Jonathan to work. "He was a very hardworking," she said. "We really love and respect them." Lewis started a GoFundMe webpage for them: [benitez-family-mudslide-fund](https://www.gofundme.com/benitez-family-mudslide-fund).

Lorena Penaloza, whose family owns Joyeria Latina Americana, also launched a GoFundMe page for them: [gofundme.com/4zuaupe](https://www.gofundme.com/4zuaupe). In addition, she set up a donation box at the Milpas Street jewelry store. She has received many donations. She described the surviving family members as very private and still in shock.

Pinit 'Oom' Sutthithepa, 30; Peerawat 'Pasta' Sutthithepa, 6; Richard 'Loring' Taylor, 79



The Taylor-Sutthithepa family of six lived on East Valley Road. Richard "Loring" Taylor bought in the area, was 79, spent his career as an English teacher at Santa Barbara High School, and the Middle East.

He met his wife, Perm, in Thailand about 1980. She immigrated to the United States. Her son, Pinit, soon followed and attended Santa Barbara High School for a year. Oom often returned to Khon Kaen, Thailand, where he married a former schoolmate, Yuhawan. They had two kids, 6-year-old Peerawat, who was killed, and 2-year-old Lydia. In summer 2016, Aw and Perm moved to Montecito to live with Oom, Perm, and Loring. Perm's cousin, Sirithorn Jantorntho, who goes by May, also lives in Montecito.

Oom, Pasta, and Loring were killed in the storm; Lydia is still missing. Aw and Perm escaped the disaster because they were working the night shift chopping produce at Vons. May survived; she was pulled from the mud by firefighters after the rain started.

After working as a truck driver, Oom started working at Toyota Santa Barbara about three years ago. His boss, Loring, was a familiar face in Montecito. He was known to be a compelling storyteller; there wasn't a book he wouldn't read. The family had a close relationship with their neighbors, the Benítez family, who were also attacked by the storm. The surviving relatives embraced in the hospital as if they were one big family, Caldwell said.

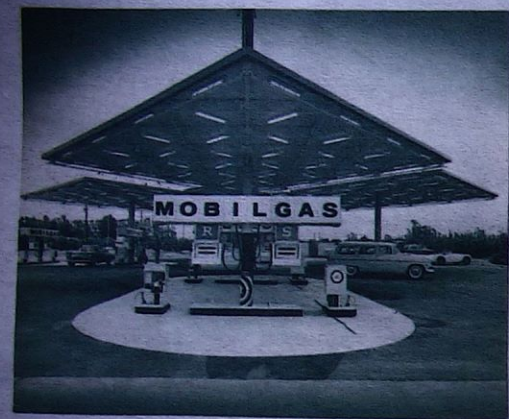
On Saturday, after Oom's body was found, they were allowed back to the leveled lot on East Valley Road for a ceremony. Reporters working for a Thai media outlet were there to take photographs. On Sunday, Perm and Aw stayed at the vigil at the Santa Barbara County Courthouse, where hundreds gathered to mourn.

Peter Fleurat, 73

Peter Fleurat was swept away from his Hot Springs Road home during the storm with his partner of 20 years, Ralph "Lalo" Barajas. Barajas, who owns Rose Café on the Mesa, survived, but Fleurat didn't. The pair lived in what friends described as a gorgeous craftsman house. Fleurat was known to be a skilled gardener, friends said. Fleurat and Barajas went on many trips, and Fleurat was willing to take on any challenge, wrote friend and guest Robert Borneman, driving fearlessly in Mexico and "laughing wildly when he would hit the topes (speed bumps) unexpectedly." When the *Santa Barbara News-Press* erroneously reported that Barajas had also been killed, lifelong friends and customers showed up to the Rose Café with flowers.

Donations can be made to support Barajas at [gofundme.com/rose-cafemontecito-mudslide-loss](https://www.gofundme.com/rose-cafemontecito-mudslide-loss).





Smith and Williams, Mobil Service Station, Anaheim, Calif. 1955. Julius Shulman, photographer. Courtesy: J. Paul Getty Trust.

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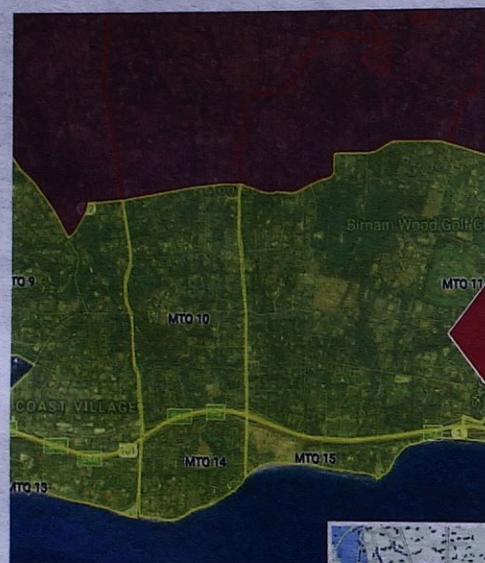
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Debris Flows, in Four Acts

by Tyler Hayden

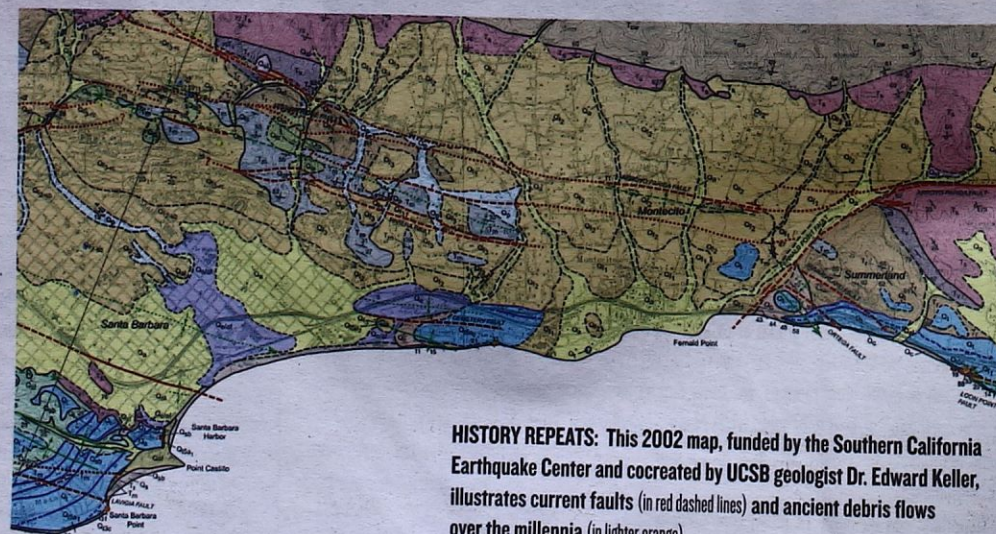
Here we illustrate in cartographical detail the predictions, warnings, aftermath, and history of debris flows in Montecito.

ALL BUT CERTAIN: During a press conference on Friday, January 5, Public Works officials presented this map that highlighted predicted flood zones, which ran down Montecito, Oak, San Ysidro, and Romero creeks, reaching all the way to the ocean and pooling between Fernald Point to the east and Butterfly Beach to the west. The map was made available on the county's website for two days, until it was replaced January 7 with the evacuation map.



NATURE KNOWS NO BOUNDS: County officials issued mandatory evacuation orders above Highway 192 (in red) and sent out voluntary evacuation advisories south of the line (in yellow). A number of people were rescued and killed below the 192. Dozens of homes were damaged or destroyed. Authorities say there was no way to predict the scope of the storm violence. They explain their thinking behind the evacuation zone boundaries on page 10.

PATHS OF DESTRUCTION: The bulk of flooding and debris flows—highlighted here in blue—cascaded down Montecito, San Ysidro, and Romero creeks. County emergency planners said they didn't expect any soil or rocks kicked loose by the rain to reach as far south as the ocean.



HISTORY REPEATS: This 2002 map, funded by the Southern California Earthquake Center and cocreated by UCSB geologist Dr. Edward Keller, illustrates current faults (in red dashed lines) and ancient debris flows over the millennia (in lighter orange).



Abe Powell

Lessons from the Mud

Montecito Fire Boardmember Abe Powell Reflects on the Storm

On the evening of Monday, January 8, Abe Powell and his family left their creek-side home in Montecito for the safety of a private residence on West Mountain Drive, away from steep mountainsides scorched bare by the Thomas Fire. A few hours later, Powell remembered, the pounding rain unleashed rockfalls that echoed violently, like the clash of colliding billiard balls. Then, in a nearby canyon, a torrent of debris snapped a 22-inch high-pressure natural gas line. "All of a sudden," he said, "there's a plume of fire shooting up into the sky. You could see these pulsing flames from Gibraltar Road to Carpinteria. I thought, Oh, lord, we're really in for it."

by Keith Hamm

For the past five years, Powell has served on the elected board of directors of the Montecito Fire Protection District. He takes public safety very seriously, and when firestorms and rainstorms bear down, friends, family, and followers turn to him for reliable information and prudent advice. In that respect, he's been voluntarily on the clock since early December, when the lit fuse of the Thomas Fire culminated in the deadly mudflows that would change Montecito forever.

Earlier this week, the *Santa Barbara Independent* caught up with Powell to reflect on the disaster.

When did you first become alarmed? After the Thomas Fire, Chief [Chip] Hickman and Kevin Taylor [of the Montecito Fire Protection District] snapped into gear, looking at the flood maps and talking to the [U.S. Forest Service] BAER [Burned Area Emergency Response] team. The BAER team said [to] take the 500-year flood map and multiply it by 10—that's what we're expecting [with] more than a half inch [of rain] an hour. So we're looking at that, with no holding capacity in the watershed [because it's been burned away]. Basically, BAER was saying, You guys are [in grave danger] if it rains hard. This was a week before the storm. Hickman and Taylor, these guys don't get ruffled by anything, and Taylor was a little bit agitated trying to get me to understand how serious he thought it was. His agitation is what snapped me into action.

Did they ask anything of you? They told me to message people about how serious this was. I asked if there would be evacuations, and [at that point] they didn't know, but it was likely. I went from being theoretically concerned to materially worried. That's when I started calling people and posting on Facebook that I thought this was serious.

What did you tell people? I spent three days at the sandbag facility at Lower Manning Park. I was telling people to put in their sandbags, [and] then pack up and go. I told them, "I'm in the voluntary evacuation zone, and I'm taking my family and leaving." The [response I got] was either mild confusion or disbelief. People just didn't think it could be that bad. Even part of me didn't think it could be that bad.

How many people did you tell to leave? Hundreds. Literally, it was eight hours a day in front of a sand pile with cars coming in and out all day. I stayed until about 6:30 Monday night. We took a last delivery of sand, and I convinced some friends to leave. My wife and kids are waiting for me, and it's raining, and that's when I set the example I said I would—to leave.

Were you surprised so many people decided to stay? No. Because I was exhausted from evacuation fatigue. We'd been out of our house for weeks because of the fire. We were tired of living out of suitcases.

Some people you talked to probably stayed and didn't make it. That's a really sensitive issue. Did I talk to people who are now not with us? Yes, I did. How do I feel about that? Mostly really sad. Could I have communicated to them better? I'm trying not to be mad at myself because I know I was doing my best.

Do you think the warnings from Santa Barbara County officials were stern enough? Here's what I think. They'd never done an evacuation like that for a flood. They thought that [their warnings were] like cannon shots across everybody's bow. A mandatory evacuation for a flood in Santa Barbara—that's never happened. Everybody was perplexed by the mild reaction. We didn't even get 20 percent evacuation in the mandatory zone. I think they thought that they had messaged it pretty clearly, and they issued the evacuation. In hindsight, I'm sure they wish the



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whole [of Montecito] had been mandatory. But I think it's really just hard to imagine that level of devastation. It's an unprecedented, off-the-chart flood.

In terms of how that evacuation went down, we all learned a lot of lessons, and I think we all would have been much more strident. One of the baseline things in an evacuation is that they're trying not to cause a panic. There's that balance of don't cause panic but communicate your anxiety, and they always try to do it in a very calm [fashion].

What would have gotten more people to leave? They sent notices, they sent the evacuation warnings, [and] then a person comes to your door and says, please leave. I don't think there was much more they could have done. Public agencies are responsible for doing all the things they did, but ultimately everybody is responsible for their own safety. At some point the burden is on us to help ourselves be safe, to keep our families safe and protect our kids.

But your own home, right next to a creek, was in a voluntary evacuation zone. Didn't that seem odd to you? No. To even be in a voluntary zone seemed significant to me. The problem with evacuating for a flood is that our evacuation zones aren't broken up by watersheds. They're broken up by roads. If you look at our zone map, it's broken up [in boxes], and you evacuate people from that box. Part of that is so you can protect it from looting. Once you clear everybody out, you kind of own it, and now you have to keep it safe. Trying to evacuate just the watersheds? They don't know how to do that yet. So what they did is gave people that map showing the flood zones. They said if you're in the flood zones, you should leave now. They posted that map on Friday, and they said, find your place; if you're in the blue [area], it's time to go. Then on Sunday they posted the evacuation orders, and the overlay [on the map] of the red and yellow evacuation areas covered up the flood zones. You couldn't see the flood map anymore underneath it.

It wasn't a watershed-based warning anymore. [The map] lost that ability, especially in the voluntary area. If you look at the [first map], that's where the flooding was. It was actually worse than that.

People inside the disaster area wanted to search and dig for survivors. What's wrong with that? There are so many hazards. Places where electricity is still on in the mud. Household hazardous chemicals. There are gas mains broken. Swimming pools you can't see [because they're covered in mud]. The [first responders] are watching each other's backs, and they have a system to assess threats and adjust their tactics. What they were doing was a very technical rescue. And when you have uninitiated humans entering that scenario, they're just in the way, and they could get hurt and need to be rescued. It was so dangerous and so unstable, and the mountain could still come down, even after it stops raining.

What about people driving their own heavy equipment for cleanup? Really bad idea. They wanted to clear their property [but] could've literally killed somebody still alive under the mud.

Why was establishment of the Public Safety Exclusion Zone on January 11 a necessary step? What I saw in Montecito that day were people riding bikes, driving around on roads that were primary conduits for emergency vehicles and getting out of their cars to take selfies. It was an absolute shitshow. There were people wanting to get in and out, getting in the way of people trying to save lives. They were bogging down the sheriff. [Deputies] had their heads in these cars, talking to people wanting special treatment instead [of having] their heads up on a swivel to protect us from looters.

And [when] Montecito Sanitary District came back out of radio silence, it was clear they didn't know where the poop was going. All of a sudden, all these people sheltering in place are flushing the toilet into what? Into the rescue operation? That's a huge problem.

That was a really critical time because we were getting late into the rescue operation. These were our last hours where we thought we'd have a chance to pull somebody out alive. The sheriff was mad. Firefighters were mad. So they dropped the hammer.

What jumps out as something we should all be proud of? The search and rescue. Just straight-up badass. Those guys got in there, just fearless. They knew the mountain could come down and kill them, and they ran in there [in] waist-deep in mud. Those guys who rescued Lauren Cantin — Andy Rupp and the other [Montecito Fire] guys, they had been training their swift-water rescue [techniques] in Lower Manning while we were sandbagging. They were getting ready, and the storm hit, and they turned around and saved people.

Anything you'd like to add? From a public-safety perspective, there are a lot of lessons we're going to learn from this. But really the story right now is the saves. The people that got saved, and those who trained their whole lives for that moment to go in and get those men and women and kids and pets. That's the whole reason those guys signed up for any of this. They went out and executed it in the most extreme circumstances we've ever seen. We've just been through the most extreme fire ever in California, and then the worst flood we've ever seen just hit us, and they went out and pulled people out of that mud. It's just incredible.



'At some point the burden is on us to help ourselves be safe, to keep our families safe and protect our kids.'

School Goes On

The handful of public and private schools in Montecito's disaster area have been scrambling to get their students and teachers back in the classroom. On Tuesday and Wednesday, Montecito Union School (MUS) — a public K-6 located at 385 San Ysidro Road — split its 415 students between the Santa Barbara Zoo and the MOXI museum; starting Thursday, Santa Barbara City College and nearby McKinley Elementary School will host MUS students, where they will remain "for at least two weeks," according to Superintendent Anthony Ranini.

Supplied with bottled water, portable toilets, and handwashing stations, the 175 students at Montecito's other public K-6, Cold Spring School, located at 2243 Sycamore Canyon Road, returned to campus on Tuesday, opening with a moment of silence for 6th-grader Sawyer Corey and kindergartner Peerawat "Pasta" Sutthithepa. The grieving extended to Corey's severely injured twin sister, Summer, and to half sister Morgan Corey, 25, who died in the floods. The Cold Spring community also lost Sutthithepa's father and grandfather; the family's youngest, 2-year-old Lydia, was still missing as of deadline Wednesday morning. Principal Amy Alzina said students and parents reunited over the weekend with crisis counseling and an all-school barbecue, and on the first day back, "there was a psychologist in every classroom."

Alzina, who has a son at Crane Country Day School, said the private K-8, located at 1795 San Leandro Lane, started up again on Thursday, January 18, with its student body split between temporary facilities in downtown Santa Barbara and Carpinteria. Laguna Blanca's Lower School, a private K-4 at 260 San Ysidro Road, has shifted its faculty, staff, and students to the Girls Inc. Goleta Valley facility at 4973 Hollister Avenue, a space with an auditorium, gym, commercial kitchen, various art and computer

studios, and an outside playground.

At Westmont College, students started returning to campus on Tuesday, and classes resumed Wednesday. The private college has provided bus service from Valencia around the Highway 101 closure, plus shuttles from the airport, harbor, and downtown train station. Water service has been restored for campus toilets, showers, and sinks but won't be drinkable until further notice from Montecito Water District.

—Keith Hamm

RECOVERY

FEMA Approves Individual Assistance

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approved emergency assistance to compensate individuals and businesses for losses suffered by the Thomas Fire and last week's flood and mud avalanche. Congressmember Salud Carbajal had lobbied FEMA administrators to approve the assistance, appealing a previous decision by the federal agency to deny it. At that time, FEMA and the Trump administration had only approved compensation for damages sustained by state and local governments.

Individual assistance — or IA, as it's known — typically is harder to sell. There are six thresholds that need to be met, the first being the number of homes destroyed. Typically, that number is 200. To date, the Thomas Fire destroyed 27 homes and the mudslide 127 in Santa Barbara County. Carbajal explained that by combining the damages inflicted by the Thomas Fire with the mudslide event — in both Santa Barbara and Ventura counties — FEMA administrators could grant the highly coveted IA request.

This enables private individuals and small businesses to seek federal compensation for money spent on hotels, motels, and evacuations, if not otherwise covered by private insurance policies. Likewise, IA can cover other expenses or losses that would not have been incurred but for the natural disaster, such as lost wages. The maximum amount that can be paid is about \$35,000.

In order to apply for such assistance, individuals must register with FEMA. Those encountering difficulties navigating FEMA's website should call Carbajal's office for assistance. The issue of private insurance, Carbajal predicted, could prove problematic. Some homeowner insurance policies, he cautioned, might not cover damages caused by a flood. If insurance companies determine that the flood damage was sustained as a result of the Thomas Fire, however, they may cover it. "Some companies will; some won't," Carbajal said. "We're going to have to see how that shakes out."

—Nick Welsh



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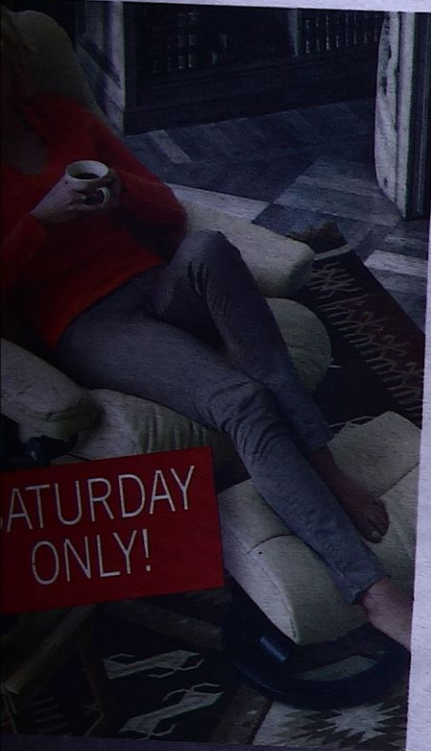
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Why Did So Few Evacuate?

by Tyler Hayden

Before January 9, few Montecitans had any concept of the cataclysmic power of debris flows. "If you're a natural scientist and you hear 'debris flow,' you think, 'Oh god, that could kill people,'" said Sue Perry, a disaster specialist with the United States Geological Survey. "But no one else around here knows what that term means."

A Carpinteria resident, Perry studies how public officials can more effectively convey imminent danger and is now assessing the effectiveness of last week's warning messages. "There's going to be a lot of scrutiny after this," she said.

Santa Barbara County's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) kick-started its public information campaign during a January 5 press conference, when federal, state, and local officials issued dire warnings about how the ferocious storm would likely send earth and water sweeping through neighborhoods below the Thomas Fire burn scar. Said Public Works Deputy Director Tom Fayram, "We can't stress enough the fact that this is a significant risk to our community."

OEM Director Robert Lewin called out the dangers of living near creeks. "They can become raging rivers of water and mud and rocks and debris, and if you live near one of those, you need to understand that," said Lewin. Four days later, most victims were killed when flows breached the walls of Montecito, San Ysidro, and Romero creeks.

Kevin Cooper, a biologist with the U.S. Forest Service, focused on the peril of debris flows — unstoppable avalanches of dislodged boulders and uprooted trees mixed with mud and water — and advised residents to heed emergency alerts. "The alerts are going to be very important," he said.

Debris flows of last week's size and scale are so infrequent that those in their path may simply have been unable to comprehend the risk, said Perry. Perhaps that's why so few people within mandatory evacuation zones — an estimated 15-20 percent — actually left their

homes. "Human nature is not set up to deal with rare events," Perry explained. "Things that seem remote or are outside our experience are tough for us to wrap our heads around."

Even Perry tried to talk herself out of leaving her home again due to evacuation fatigue from the Thomas Fire, but she called the strikingly low number of evacuees "frustrating and discouraging." The solution isn't as simple as more warnings. That can elicit a "cry wolf" effect and make residents ignore future warnings. During the 2009 Station Fire in Los Angeles County, for example, some communities were ordered to evacuate as many as 20 times in six weeks. Every time an order

was issued, Perry said, fewer people left. It was a miracle that the debris flow that eventually came didn't kill anyone, she said.

Reframing disaster language can help. Before 2012's Hurricane Sandy, Perry said, few people understood the term "storm surge," a wall of water pushed from ocean to land by intense winds. After the hurricane, which killed 233 people, she

noticed authorities and journalists begin to use more detailed and vivid wording to describe the extreme weather event. "Debris flow" may be one of those terms, she said.

The Santa Barbara public may have benefited from seeing more photos or videos of debris flows, which are visually and sonically petrifying, as bus-sized boulders floating like toy boats gnash and crash down mountainsides. Then again, such depictions may be interpreted as scare tactics and ignored, Perry said.

Cara Cuite is a human ecologist at Rutgers University who heads a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration-sponsored project on best practices in storm communication. "You need to make people believe they're at risk and take it seriously," she said. "Once you have their attention, tell them what to do. Being told they're at risk without telling them how to reduce that risk just triggers a stress response without action."

CONTINUED ON P. 27 >>>

PTSD Comes Next

by Nick Welsh

Even after the waters have receded and all the mud's been washed away, impacts of Montecito's landslide will be felt for a long time to come, said Dr. Brett Wilson, medical director for Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital's Emergency Department. Wilson, a 1991 graduate of Dos Pueblos High School, got his medical degree from Tulane University in New Orleans. When Hurricane Katrina hit that city in 2005, Wilson was on call. In recent weeks, he and Cottage's emergency medical staff have been juggling a major flu outbreak — eight dead in two weeks — with the massive demands imposed by the Montecito mud flood. Saying there have been 28 ER admissions hardly tells the story. Nor does the clinically detached term "blunt force trauma," the medical description for what ails those admitted: One person injured in the disaster reportedly suffered massive abrasions and had large chunks of muscle gouged out of his back, which was also broken.

With the first wave over, Wilson is bracing for new arrivals, people checking themselves in for seemingly minor cuts and wounds that have since become infected. Those physical issues are obvious and can be fixed. Less apparent, however, is the long-term psychic toll inflicted by the disaster. "People will get a little more irritable," Wilson warned. "They will have less patience. We'll see a lot more self-medicating." The provocation, he said, will be intense. Recovery will be anything but fast. Governmental red tape and insurance-company hassles will be staggering. Grief and exasperation will be kicking in. It will take Montecito a long time to look like Montecito again. Wilson's own sister lost her house in the recent storm. "She didn't take anything with her," he said. "Like everyone else, there were dishes still in her sink."

Wilson said emergency medical personnel are feeling the toll. "This is a small town. We all know people who are getting wheeled in here," he said. "It's not like we're treating Patient A or B. It's personal." His staff holds regular debriefings. "We all get together and ask each other, 'Are you okay?'"

A lot of the time, however, it's not that simple. "You can't just say, 'Tell me your story.' It doesn't come out that way," he said. "It often comes out when you ask about something else completely. But when it does, you need to be able to listen. Otherwise, it just gets all bottled up. People start to get real quiet and withdrawn. That's not healthy." Wilson also discouraged close friends and intimates from saying, "Tell me what you need" or asking, "What can I do for you?" Instead, he urged, "Invite them out to lunch or dinner. Just be there."

Everyone will respond differently, he said. Wilson admitted he still gets the heebie-jeebies at the sound of helicopters from his days during Katrina. "I got to the point I could tell you exactly what kind of helicopter it was by the sound of its motor." For others, it could be the sound of rain, the smell of mud.

By most reckonings, Cottage ER operations have survived the first wave exceedingly well even though many emergency health

providers commute from points south and are effectively blocked from making it to work. Workers trained in emergency care protocol now assigned to Cottage's Goleta or Santa Ynez hospitals have been transferred to Santa Barbara.

Of Cottage's 3,700 workers, roughly 600 commute from Ventura County or points south in Santa Barbara County. Cottage administrators have responded by booking rooms in area hotels or motels for 100-200 workers a night. Another 25 have been getting ferried to work by boat.



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GEOLOGY

When the Big One Isn't an Earthquake

The Deadly Debris Flow in Montecito Was a Rare Event,
but It Could Happen Again

by Melinda Burns

The surging river of mud and boulders that engulfed swaths of Montecito from the mountains to the sea last week, killing 20, was a rare disaster — so rare, geologists say, that it may happen only once in a few hundred to a thousand years at that location.

But that doesn't mean it couldn't happen again this winter, said Ed Keller, a professor of earth science at UC Santa Barbara. All of the communities below the scorched slopes of the Thomas Fire are at risk, he said.

“These areas are very vulnerable in the next two years to debris flows,” Keller said. “We could get another one right down Montecito Creek this year, if we get another big rainfall, depending on how much debris is left up in the basin. It's not impossible.”

The catastrophic debris flow of January 9 in Montecito is the deadliest disaster to hit the South Coast since a magnitude 6.8 earthquake struck Santa Barbara on the morning of June 29, 1925, leveling the downtown and killing 13.

Debris flows launch massive quantities of rocks, boulders, trees, and mud downhill. They are typically triggered after wildfires on steep mountainsides, when heavy rains wash away the soil.

“Big debris flows are relatively rare,” said Keller, who is applying for national funding to study the footprint and volume of the January 9 event. “They don't occur after every fire in any one stream. The Thomas Fire was huge, and there are only a couple of places with really damaging debris flows. Montecito and San Ysidro creeks were primed for one.”

In catastrophic debris flows such as the one in Montecito, narrow canyons chock-full of boulders start to flood, and landslides may occur. Rocks and brush form temporary dams and then break through and roar downhill on thick slurries of mud. Car-sized boulders bob along like corks.

In Montecito, the wall of mud and debris was 15 feet high in some locations.

“You may get pulses of flows rushing out of canyons in the mountains,” said Larry Gurrola, a Ventura-based consulting geologist who is on Keller's research team. “That material reaches the base of the foothills, chokes the streams, flows out over the banks, and moves toward the ocean, dragging trees, brush, cars, utility poles, and parts of homes along with it.”

Through the millennia, debris flows have shaped the terrain of the South Coast. Almost

all of Montecito and most of Santa Barbara are built on top of flows that occurred here over the past 125,000 years, Keller said: Just look at the boulder field at Rocky Nook Park. That's evidence of a catastrophic flow out of Rattlesnake Canyon in prehistoric times, he said.

During the past 50 years, the South Coast has seen a few destructive but not catastrophic debris flows. Just last January, during heavy rain following the Sherpa Fire of June 2016 in the mountains along the Gaviota Coast, a debris flow washed 22 vehicles and five cabins down El Capitan Creek and sent boulders into the surf. Emergency crews rescued two dozen campers.

This January 3, county emergency preparedness officials showed the Board of Supervisors photos of damage from the debris flows that followed the Coyote and Romero fires of 1964 and 1971, respectively. Both years, San Ysidro, Olive Mill, and Coast Village roads in Montecito were choked with mud.

This year, the stage was set for catastrophe after the Thomas Fire burned 440 square miles in December and January, largely in the backcountry of Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, becoming the largest fire in California history. It scorched the chaparral that anchors the soil to the bedrock and created a “hydrophobic” layer in the ground—a kind of crust that repels water like glass.

In an era of year-round fire seasons, the Thomas Fire had not been fully contained when the rainy season got underway in earnest.

“It was just kind of the perfect storm, when all the bad factors line up together,” said Jon Frye, Santa Barbara County engineering manager. “There was no time whatsoever between the fire and the winter.”

The trigger for the catastrophic debris flow in Montecito, geologists say, was several bursts of extreme rainfall, beginning at 3:34 a.m. One of these was a 200-year event—more than half an inch of rain falling in 5 minutes. That's a quarter of the total amount of rain, 2.1 inches, that was recorded in Montecito during the nine-hour storm.

A U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) debris-flow hazard map that was widely circulated before the January 9 storm showed the high probability of debris flows originating in the mountains above Mountain Drive in Montecito on the heels of the Thomas Fire. The slopes there are on a “hair trigger,” said Dennis

Staley, a USGS research geologist who helped prepare the map. The harder the rainfall, the bigger the flow, he said.

“We knew that if it rained very hard, there could be very significant debris flows,” Staley said. “If you plug in the intensities that were received, our prediction aligns with what we saw.”

In any given year, there is only a half-percent chance that half an inch of rain will fall on Montecito in five minutes, said Jayme Laber, a senior hydrologist with the National Weather Service in Oxnard.

“It was a typical winter storm, but five-minute rainfall was extreme, something that you don't see very often,” he said.

The five-minute, half-inch downpour began at 3:38 a.m. near Casa Dorinda, at Olive Mill and Hot Spring roads, county records show. Between 3:34 a.m. and 3:51 a.m., three additional bursts of extreme rainfall—50-year events with a 2 percent chance of occurring in any given year—were recorded on gauges near Gibraltar Peak and in downtown Carpinteria.

These were the heaviest short-term, high-intensity rainfalls recorded during the entire storm from Redding to San Diego, Laber said.

“It was horrible that it was right on top of the Thomas Fire burn area,” he said.

The first reports of the debris flow came in to the Weather Service shortly before 4 a.m.

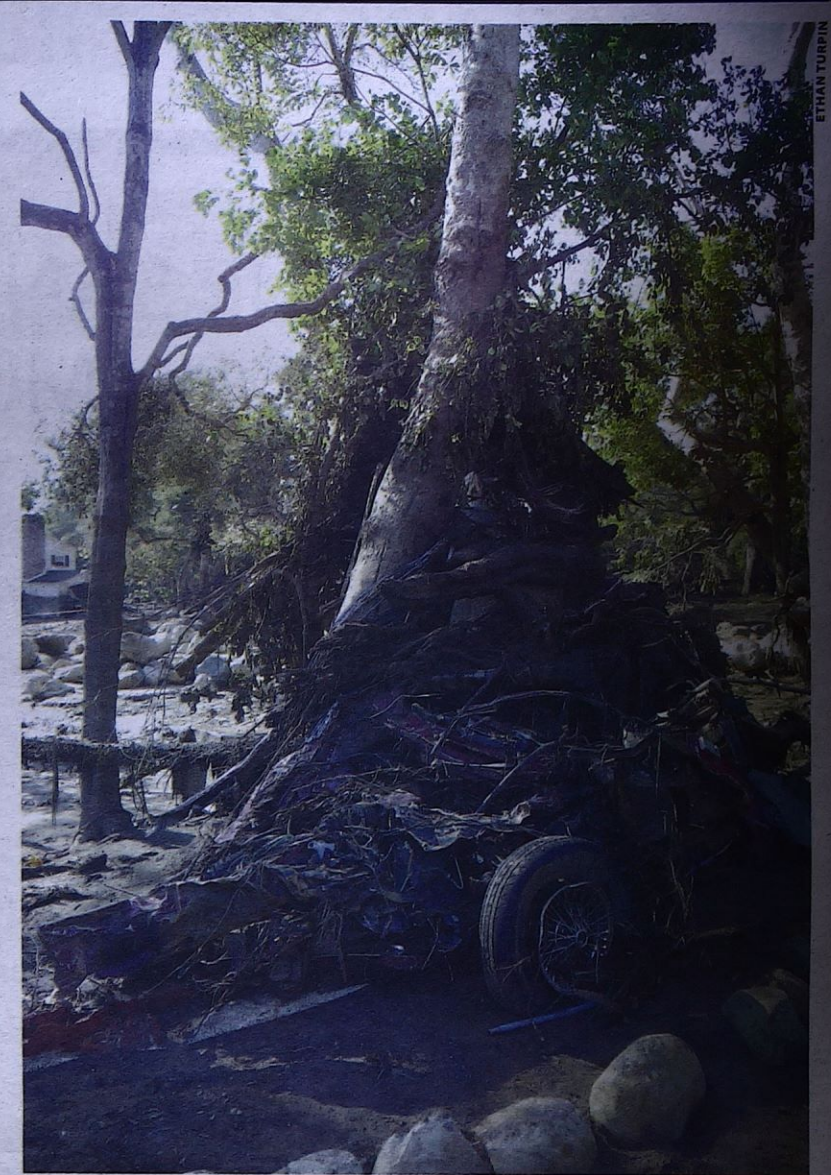
Meanwhile, there was no major damage in Ventura County during the January 9 storm. Ventura County took the brunt of the Thomas Fire, but was not pounded on January 9 with the short-term, high-intensity deluge that overwhelmed Montecito, Laber said.

The historical record shows that previous debris flows on the South Coast closed Highway 101 and caused a lot of damage to property but did not kill anyone.

In 1964, a few months after the Coyote Fire burned 100 square miles above Santa Barbara, Montecito, Summerland, and Carpinteria, records show, a debris flow destroyed 12 homes and six bridges on Mission Creek in Santa Barbara. Eyewitness accounts told of “20-foot walls of water, mud, boulders, and trees moving down the channels at approximately 15 miles per hour.”

During heavy rains following the 1971 Romero Fire, which burned 20 square miles in the mountains behind Santa Barbara, Montecito, Summerland, and Carpinteria, Highway 101 was blocked for eight hours near Carpinteria. A wall of mud and water three feet high pushed across the freeway toward the ocean.

“Looking back, there is clear evidence that this type of thing happens in Santa Barbara with some regularity,” said Staley, the USGS geologist.



ETHAN TURPIN

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In the face of the recent natural disaster that has rocked our community, we would like to send a message of gratitude to all those who have been working tirelessly to save lives, find survivors and keep our neighborhoods safe.

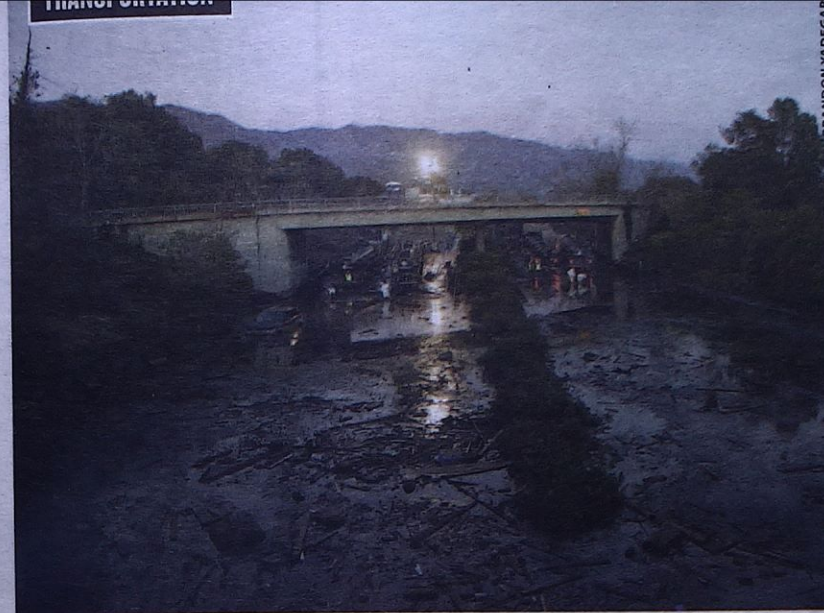
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By Boat and by Train

by Kelsey Brugger

Facing Santa Barbara, the view of Highway 101 from the Olive Mill Road overpass on Tuesday was a soupy mess. Black mud covered the median, a bulldozer's giant claw scooped the mud toward open space, and the conveyor-belt track of the CAT sunk into the sludge, almost appearing stuck. Motorists should not expect to go anywhere very soon.

In the opposite direction, Caltrans's progress was much more visible. The layer of mud coating the freeway was thin enough that trucks could glide over it. What was left of the green shrubbery was visible again. In a matter of days, Caltrans managed to clean up about a half mile of highway.

Nonetheless, Caltrans continues to push back the highway's reopening. On Monday, it announced the 101 would remain closed for "at least a week." Several days prior, the state agency had reported that water from the hillsides continued to run down the least resistant path and pour onto the freeway.

But by Tuesday, the water stream had stopped, said Caltrans spokesperson Jim Shivers. They were removing more large, solid pieces of debris in the gunk, he added. This all could change, however, depending on the next rain.

Trains, meanwhile, have been running — rather full, if not exactly on time. Last weekend, Amtrak added more railcars, enough for 2,000 passengers. But this addition helps just a fraction of the roughly 15,000 Ventura residents who work in Santa Barbara. Riders going north and south told the *Santa Barbara Independent* that passengers were stuffed inside like sardines. On one rush-hour trip, 12 riders squeezed into the restroom.

In addition, ferries have transported employees, particularly health-care providers, to work. And on Tuesday, a caravan of 18 buses transported "critical" employees who live in Ventura to work in Santa Barbara. They left before sunrise and returned home after dark, staying out of the way as much as possible.

Tankers and National Guard vehicles, after all, have made Coast Village Road look like a military base. And north of Hot Springs Road, mud trucks are barreling down Highway 101. They first went to West Beach so the contents could be sorted. After pieces of wood were separated, the mud trucks were sent to Ash Avenue in Carpinteria or to Goleta Beach. An emergency permit issued by the Army Corps of Engineers authorized the work. The permit called for "approximately 300,000 cubic yards of sediment" accumulated in the Montecito area to be dumped. That translates to about 30,000 trips. It is unclear how much mud total will have to be cleaned up. The permit expires on February 20.

On Tuesday just before rush hour, a mud truck traveling northbound spilled over at Patterson Avenue in Goleta, blocking traffic for several miles. Caltrans workers rushed over to clean it up.

Shivers noted that even when the mud looks clear from the view on the overpass at Olive Mill, their work would not be done. The pavement needs to be tested, and some road signs might need to be replaced.



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Evacuations

Cont'd from p. 19

Cell-phone alerts sent by the OEM in the days and hours leading up to Tuesday's storm advised residents to "shelter in place or go to high ground." An emergency communications specialist who wished to remain anonymous contacted the *Santa Barbara Independent* on Monday with concerns about the clarity of the county's messaging. He called the alerts "confusing," asking if "high ground" was meant to be interpreted as a higher point within a home or up a nearby hill. He also said the wording suggested the two options were mutually exclusive, when in fact the safest option for many residents was to both shelter in place and climb to a second floor, attic, or roof.

Cuite acknowledged the limitations of cell-phone alerts, and emphasized the tricky tap dance of crisis communication, which must scare people to act without paralyzing them or losing their trust if disaster doesn't strike. "You want to instill enough fear to motivate people, but not so much they're just overwhelmed and shut down," she said. "It's a sweet spot in communication."

There's no average for how many people typically heed evacuation orders, but Cuite said Montecito's 15-20 percent feels particularly low. Thirty-five to 50 percent of residents usually evacuate during major hurricanes.

On January 5, four days before the storm, the County of Santa Barbara posted on its Facebook page a map of predicted flooding and debris flows, which covered large portions of Montecito. "My entire work zone that I return to on Monday," wrote a commenter. "Scared!"

The county replied: "We don't want to scare anyone. Knowing the potential and being prepared is half the battle."



ETHAN TURPIN

Disaster Relief Events

1/18: Promoting Resilience in the Wake of Local Disasters Experts in disaster mental health will offer guidance to help our community heal. 7pm. New Vic, 33 W. Victoria St. **Free.** tinyurl.com/PromoteResilience

1/18: S.B. Symphony Free Benefit Concert This evening of community and comfort will feature guitarist and artist-in-residence Pablo Sáinz Villegas accompanied by a small orchestra. Free tickets will be available at the S.B. Symphony's office (call for hours) and at the door and issued on a first-come, first-served basis. 7:30pm. The Granada Theatre, 1214 State St. **Free.** Call 898-9386.

1/20: 2018 Kickoff: Community Cocktail For a Cause This Glitz, Glam & Get Down rooftop celebration will donate a portion of proceeds to benefit United Way of S.B.'s Thomas Fire and Flood Fund. 7pm. Canary Hotel Rooftop, 31 W. Carrillo St. \$120. tinyurl.com/Canary2018KickOff

1/20: LOMO Relief: A Benefit for Montecito Flood Relief Efforts With a sense of community, the Stolpman Vineyards team has mobilized the entire town of Los Olivos to raise money for the Thomas Fire and flood relief efforts. On Saturday, participating Los Olivos businesses will be donating up to 20 percent of the day's proceeds to our local Direct Relief Foundation. For a list of participating businesses, visit lomorelief.com.

1/21: Artist Talk: Richard Schloss Meet the artist and enjoy 42 en plein air works. Fifteen percent of new sales will go to two artists who lost their home and studio in the Carpinteria mountains. 2-4pm. Palm Loft Gallery, 410 Palm Ave., Loft A-1, Carpinteria. **Free.** Call 684-9700.

1/22: The 37th Annual Messiah Sing-Along This event will be presented as a statement of unity and solidarity of our community in the wake of the recent devastating disasters. All proceeds will go toward the Unity Shoppe. 7:30pm. First Presbyterian Church, 21 E. Constance Ave. \$15-\$20. Call 965-4122.

1/28: Quire of Voyces: The Mysteries of Christmas: A Healing Concert for Our Community The Quire will sing music that soothes and heals. Firefighters and first responders can receive free tickets. 3pm. St. Anthony's Chapel, Garden Street Academy, 2300 Garden St. \$15-\$20. Call 965-5935. quireofvoyces.org/concerts

1/28: SoCal Strong Concert for Thomas Fire Victims Fund More than eight bands, including the Tearaways, will perform to raise money for victims of the recent fire. 3-11pm. SOHO Restaurant & Music Club, 1221 State St. \$25-\$200. Call 962-7776. sohosb.com

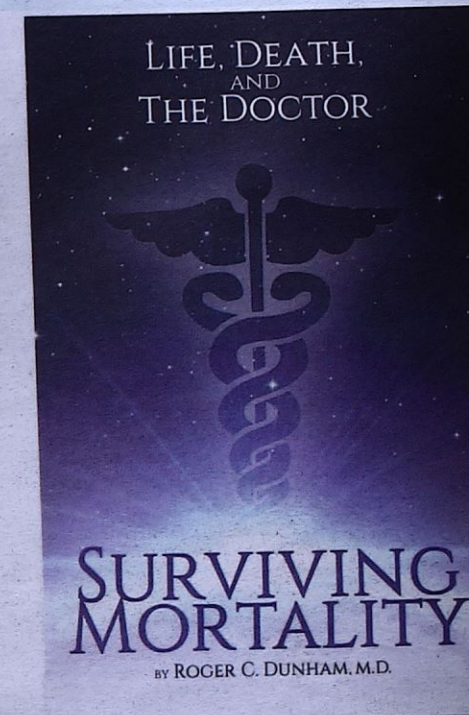
2/3: Thomas Fire Benefit Festival! The concert includes the Kevin Costner Band, Olivia Newton-John, Colbie Caillat, Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, and more. VIP includes food, wine and beer (for ages 21+), and the concert. General admission is for the concert only, and kids get in for free. VIP: 2-10pm. \$200. GA: 4-10pm. **Free**-\$50. Plaza Park, 651 E. Thompson Blvd., Ventura. \$50-\$200. thomasfirebenefit.com

2/25: Kick Ash Bash Say thank you to our heroic first responders at this massive celebration. All funds collected will go toward all first-responder organizations. Ticket price and on-sale date are to be announced. Noon-6pm. Nesbitt Bella Vista Estate, 2800 Via Real, Summerland. kickashbash.com

—Terry Ortega

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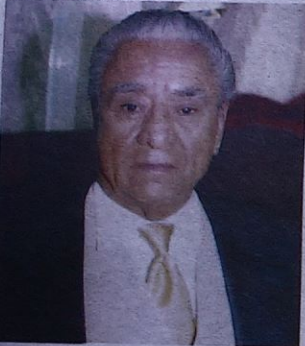
Virginia Hawley

Correction: Virginia Hawley's life celebration will be held on February 3, 2018 at 2720 Puesta del Sol, Santa Barbara.

The original date was cancelled due to the fire. Please contact Maya Adams at (805) 770-0251 for information or email at mayaqmadams@gmail.com.

Alejandro Ortega

05/03/32-01/12/18



Alejandro Ortega, age 85, lived a long beautiful life, having immigrated to the United States from Mexico City, alongside his wife Maria of 63 years. They raised 5 children, Lupe (Elias), Alejandro Jr (Martha), Sal (Jana), Ale (Lupe), Art and 14 grandkids & 8 great grandkids. Alejandro resided in Santa Barbara and worked as a chef for many years at Harry's Plaza & Joe's Café, making a career change he went to work for the City of Santa Barbara at the SB Airport where he retired after 25 years of service. One of his early passions was cycling, having been a resilient professional cyclist, he shared that joy with his children, he loved music and dancing so much such that he helped young musicians start local bands, most memorable "Los Juniors" in Santa Barbara of which he had fond memories. Alejandro was known as a quiet man who spoke softly and would lend a hand to anyone in need, he was a handyman who shared the gift of fixing anything that needed repair, adding to his hobbies of repairing TV's and rewiring electrical circuits, his hands-on approach built structure to his home. Our family would like to thank SB Cottage MICU for their compassion and care of our father and Hospice of SB. He is survived by his wife Maria, children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Valla con Dios Papa, until we meet again.

Services handled by Welch Rice-Haider, Rosary Thursday 1/18 at 7pm Our Lady of Guadalupe and Friday 1/19 Mass Services at 10AM Our Lady of Guadalupe followed by burial at Calvary Cemetery.

James Armas Ranta

11/09/46-01/12/18



James Armas Ranta, age 71, had a heart attack late Thursday night and passed away early Friday morning, January 12, 2018 here in Santa Barbara, California. Born November 9th, 1946 in Claremont, New Hampshire, he is survived by his wife of 45 years, Nancy Ranta, daughter Heather Schwerin and husband Will Schwerin with grandchild-

Jim moved to California in 1964 and attended Riverside Junior College and then went on to UCSB. From a young age, he had a love for water sports and was named an All-American swimmer in 1967 and 1968 and helped UCSB to its first ever NCAA Division II Swim Team Championship in 1967. He played in the first NCAA Water Polo Championship Tournament with the Gauchos in 1968, and is a member of the UCSB Hall of Fame. While at UCSB, he also met Nancy and they were married in June of 1972. He began teaching at Santa Barbara High School in 1971 and shortly thereafter went to Dos Pueblos High School where he taught math and became the head Swim and Water Polo coach.

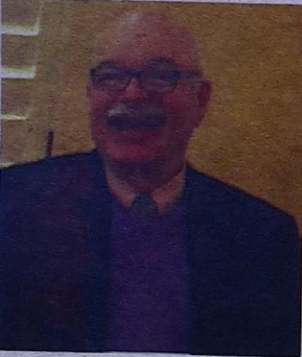
Jim truly loved working with youth and had a natural ability to make students feel valued and supported. He also made math class tolerable and somehow fun. He continued as a teacher and coach for 40+ years. During this time he guided and mentored hundreds of students and helped them realize their potential and become successful adults. He retired in 2012, but continued to assist as a swim coach and referee water polo throughout Southern California.

The impact Jim had on aquatics in the Santa Barbara community was immense and will always be appreciated and remembered. His laugh and energy were contagious, and to know him was to love him. He enjoyed spending time with family, the outdoors, traveling, singing karaoke and was always up for a good time. He will forever be missed and never forgotten.

A confirmed location and date for a Celebration of Life in February will be shared soon.

Thomas Henderson Schmid

08/06/43-12/25/17



THOMAS HENDERSON-SCHMID of Santa Barbara, CA, died peacefully, on December 25, 2017, Elizabeth Wheatcroft Schmid, his loving wife of 51-years by his side. Tom was born on August 6, 1943 in Houston, Texas the third child and second son of Albert "Abe" D. and Nancy Bell Hunter Schmid. He attended Houston Public Schools, Austin College (B.A. - History), Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (M. Div.), and McCormick Theological Seminary (D. Min.). Tom served in the United States Coast Guard during the Vietnam era, working aids to navigation on the lower Mississippi river between Memphis, Tennessee and Vicksburg, Mississippi. He was Honorably Discharged from the service at the end of 1971 the same year he was ordained by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Tom was called to serve churches in Lafayette (LA), New Orleans, San Antonio, Lincoln (NE), Mechanicsburg (PA), and Falls Church (VA) mentoring many of his associates into their own pastorates. During his 38-year ministry Tom was the author of one book, Dawn in the Afternoon, as well as countless poems, sermons, and book reviews. Upon his retirement the Falls Church Presbyterian Church proclaimed him Pastor Emeritus.

illustrious sense of humor and memorable, distinctive laugh. He believed in facial hair, sporting at least his signature mustache most of his life. Tom loved trains enjoying many traveling adventures over much of the United States and choosing his burial plot based on its proximity to the Amtrak line in Santa Barbara. Tom was a voracious reader and the custodian of a large personal library that featured many texts from multiple genres. He loved listening to classical and jazz music while sitting in his library reading a book, writing or working a crossword puzzle. Tom loved eating biscuits and gravy, eggs benedict, red beans and rice, ice cream of all varieties (especially strawberry), Krispy Kream Donuts, and the occasional glass of bourbon (W.L. Weller was a favorite) but no food was as important to Tom as the hot dog which he enjoyed with chili and onions. His favorite hot dog stand was James Coney Island in Houston, Texas.

More than anything Tom loved his family. He was preceded in death by his parents, his brother, Joe Hunter Schmid and mentor, the Rev. George Richard "Dick" Wheatcroft. Tom is survived by his loving wife and their children, Albert Schmid and his wife Kimberly, Gretchen Schmid and her wife Tiffany James, Rachel Van Mullem and her husband Justin, and Bennett Schmid and his wife Ana; his sister Gail Smith and her husband Wayne of Longview, Texas; sister-in-law Judy Schmid of Katy, Texas; nine adored grandchildren; and many beloved nieces and nephews. A memorial service celebrating Tom's life will be held at Trinity Episcopal Church in Santa Barbara at 6:30 pm on Friday, February 2, 2018. If desired, gifts in memoriam may be directed to the Santa Barbara Family YMCA Campaign for Children and Youth or The Edward Hake Phillips Internship Endowment at Austin College that Tom helped to establish.

Palmita 'Bella' Sanchez

05/02/23-01/01/18



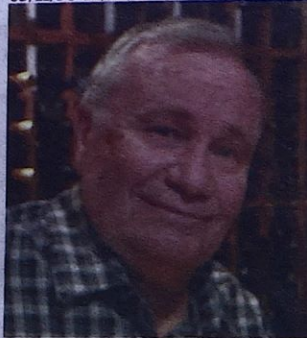
Palmita, better known as Bella was born and raised in Mountain View, California. She was one of eleven children. Her parents Manuel and Dulcenombre Diaz immigrated from Spain. She started working early in life in orchards with her mother than later in the fish canneries in Monterey, California. Bella loved to dance and met her future husband Pete Sanchez with some friends. They married, bought a house in Pacific Grove where they raised three sons. Bella and Pete moved to Santa Barbara in the 1970s to be near where their sons had moved. They spent more than thirty years at the Edgerly Arms apartments behind the Moose Lodge where they formed many friendships in their retired life. Bella was preceded in death by her son Gregory, all ten siblings, and husband Pete. She is survived by her two sons Michael and Ron, daughters in law Gail and Nancy, two grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

She was a devoted wife and mother and her funny, feisty personality will be

years at the Californian nursing home where the entire staff always met her needs with excellent care. A private burial will be held by immediate family.

Gerald 'Jerry' Lee Miller

03/11/50-12/22/17



Jerry Miller, our loving father, amazing husband, and one of the kindest souls alive, passed away unexpectedly, but so peacefully in his sleep on December 21/22nd. The Chinese culture believes that the few people who pass away in this peaceful and kind manner have lived the most honorable lives - they have 'earned' this special passage from all the good that they have done in their current and past lives. That was exactly who Jerry was: a kind, special, and honorable presence on this earth and in our lives. Although his loved ones were not ready, Jerry needed to step out of his physical body and the pain it so often brought him most of his life, leave that physical vessel behind, and walk freely and easily for the first time in decades. He was so happy and feeling so good, both mentally and physically, and surrounded by the love of his family and pets, God took Jerry's hand in his peaceful sleep because he needs him alongside him now.

Jerry was born in Downey, CA, moved to Running Springs as a young adult, then to Santa Barbara in 1969, and eventually to Mesa Oaks/Lompoc in 1987. Jerry endured many lengthy hospitalizations and surgeries throughout his life due to contracting polio as an infant, but his physical limitations led him to be the young adult and future man he was destined to be: funny, kind, hard-working and positive - always so positive. Jerry's various life-long professions didn't always define who he was, but they always reflected the hardworking, honest, fair, and funny man he was. Whether it was working along side his father, or at a much-loved stint as a reindeer ranger at Santa's Village, to framing art during college, later building and sailing NACRA catamarans, and ultimately as a knowledgeable systems engineer at Vandenberg AFB, Jerry took each job seriously and with his full life force. It was his hobbies that truly touched his heart and soul: sailing, fishing, his love of music and guitars, traveling to Australia, New Zealand and Fuji, often visiting New Mexico and Sedona, the love and care he took of his family and home and, of course, his two side-kick Persians, Reddington and Rufus. Tee-ball coach through Babe Ruth and basketball, Jerry coached and guided so many amazing young people in Lompoc. And the Dodgers. We cannot forget Jerry's lifelong love and support for his beloved Dodgers!

Jerry was able to enjoy his hard-earned and well-deserved retirement for the past year and a half. Jerry had recently endured two months of hospitalizations, surgeries, and rehabilitation this past spring, but he fought to live and stay on this precious earth. He appreciated so much to be healthy again and back to the loving fold of his family and home.

years, husband and wife for 36 yrs. We created an awesome life together and three amazing children, who were the ultimate love and highlights of Jerry's life: Clea Elisse, Kaitlyn Laurel (Onyx) and Devin Fenwick Miller (Angela). These wonderful humans were Jerry's highest achievements in his life, hands down. Jerry also leaves his cherished brother John (brother Ken was preceded in death), and loving sisters Sharon-Joy and Pat, plus many loving nieces and nephews. Brother-in-law, John, was a constant friend and brother of Jerry's for 40 years as well.

Jerry's life celebration will be held on Friday, January 19th at 2:00 pm at our home, 3118 Oak Pointe Drive, Mesa Oaks. Please contact me with any questions at ptenwickmiller@yahoo.com.

Jerry's life touched and affected so many throughout the years, he was so loved and will be so fondly remembered. His family would love to see you and have you participate in his life celebration to share funny stories and antidotes, even possibly some photos of his time with you. We are all so personally humbled to have had this wonderful and amazing kind soul in our lives, and he will now walk beside us on every adventure effortlessly and in no pain, happy, and at peace.

There is no doubt in our minds that in 20 years, an amazing young Dodger who will defy all those before him, someone who will run bases the fastest, hit the longest home runs, and be a kind and loving inspiration for all, will clearly be Jerry enjoying his next amazing life.

Rest In Peace, Sweetheart, I cannot wait until we get to see each again! With All My Love, Your Patty Ann

Christopher Edward Linquist

04/19/69-10/27/17



Christopher Edward Linquist passed away October 27, 2017 at the young age of 48 from an undiagnosed heart condition. Chris was born in Orange County California on April 19, 1969 and moved to Santa Barbara with his parents Edward and Pamela Linquist in May of 1969. Chris graduated from Dos Pueblos High School in 1987 and went to Long Beach State University and graduated with a Fine Arts degree in 1991. After graduation Chris remained in the LA area working for a pet shop and building salt-water reef aquariums for customers. He then started a career with Wells Fargo Bank. In his 22 years with the bank he lived in the San Francisco Bay area, Washington State until finally moving back to Santa Barbara with his daughter Annika in 2014. In Chris' spare time he loved to go to car shows in LA and finding great restaurants with his daughter Annika. You never saw Chris without a camera taking amazing pictures of the world around him. Chris is survived by his loving daughter Annika, parents Edward and Pamela, sister Catherine Demourkas, brother-in-law Tom, niece and nephew Avery and Brody, and Grandmother Edna Linquist and so many other family and friends. A celebration of Chris' life will happen at a time and place

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WHO COULD HAVE POSSIBLY FORESEEN IT?



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by TOM TOMORROW

IT ALSO SEEMS POSSIBLE THAT HE COULD START A NUCLEAR WAR WITH A TWEET!

THAT WOULD BE UNFORTUNATE! I HAVE HOLDINGS IN NEW YORK CITY!



WELL, AT LEAST WE GOT OUR TAX CUT.

YES, IT'S IMPORTANT TO KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE.



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Publisher's Note

On our cover last week, a sticky note advertisement appeared alongside the "Mudslides" headline. We apologize for the insensitivity conveyed by the proximity of the two. Though such ads are planned weeks in advance, the publishing of this pairing was an unfortunate oversight given that Laguna Blanca's Lower School campus is located in the Montecito evacuation zone.

This Did Not Have to Happen

Open Letter to Supervisors Williams and Hartmann:

While it may seem too soon to express these types of concerns — and I am beyond sad for those impacted by the mudslides — I want my government officials to know I am distraught because I am convinced the deaths in Montecito did not have to happen. I am sincerely grateful to the hardworking, dedicated civil servants and volunteers; I want to also articulate concerns and recommendations as our elected officials consider ways to avoid similar catastrophes in the future:

Climate scientists globally acknowledge that a warming Earth pumps more water into the atmosphere, which eventually returns with a vengeance. Their models correctly predict extremes in drought, storms, fire, and flood, yet the majority of our national politicians, corrupted by personal agendas, treat scientists with disdain. The way we approach climate issues has to change immediately, and it should serve as justification for serious campaign finance reform.

Regionally, deregulation of utility and energy companies has resulted in lax monitoring and insufficient infrastructure maintenance in order to increase profits. We experienced this with the Refugio Oil Spill. Some believe the Thomas Fire started because of a utility line failure. Infrastructure maintenance and improvement must become budgetary and regulatory priorities.

Here, people lost homes and many perished in the voluntary evacuation zone, and many relocated there from the mandatory zone with a false sense of security.

map for their January 5 public briefing that correctly predicted that the places to watch most closely were the streams and related low-lying areas. However, evacuation zone maps appeared based on elevation contours or other criteria, not stream morphology.

Each of these concerns can be addressed with pragmatic solutions — provided there is sufficient motivation. This incident should remind us that we remain at risk because of misplaced priorities. Before the next storm, please commission a more appropriate mandatory evacuation map that accounts for low-lying areas below hillsides and near creeks and their flood plains. With the multiple large burn footprints in the region, this should span the entire South Coast.

Bottom line: Our dear friends did not have to perish. Let's take this opportunity to create a safer community in their honor.

— Mark Kram, Goleta

For the Record

Last week's story on Target neglected to clarify that the CVS there will be a pharmacy and should have stated that the store acts on comments from guests about merchandise.

The Independent welcomes letters of less than 250 words that include a daytime phone number for verification. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Send to: Letters, S.B. Independent, 12 E. Figueroa St., Santa Barbara, CA 93101; or fax: 965-5518; or email: letters@independent.com. Unabridged versions and more letters appear at independent.com/opinions.

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